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American Galleries in National Gallery of Art's West Building Begin Reopening After Two Years of Facilities Renovations



George Bellows, *New York*, 1911, oil on canvas
National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon
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The National Gallery of Art is reopening its American galleries, which will display some 150 paintings by virtually every important figure in American painting from the 18th to the early 20th century and will include many of these artists' greatest masterpieces. Ten of the American galleries, among them the room featuring Augustus Saint-Gaudens' monumental plaster model of his *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment*, are on public view in time for the nearby focus exhibition, *Designing the Lincoln Memorial: Daniel Chester French and Henry Bacon*, which opens on February 12, 2009, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's birthday. By late February, all fourteen American galleries will be open.

During a two-year period of ongoing repair, restoration, and renovation, works normally on view in these galleries were either in storage, on loan, or featured in a special installation—*Crosscurrents: American and European Masterpieces from the Permanent Collection*—in the West Building Ground Floor galleries.

"Even before the National Gallery opened to the public in 1941, the Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust gave a gift of paintings as the foundation for a section devoted to American Art," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Today we are the beneficiaries of Mellon's vision and the generosity of many donors, with the leading example of Andrew's son Paul Mellon, who have made this collection of American art one of the world's most outstanding."

The Gallery's collection of some 1,000 American paintings from the 18th to early 20th century represents the largest holding of any school in the Gallery. When the National Gallery of Art first opened the doors of its West Building in 1941, fewer than 20 American paintings—all gifts of the Mellon Trust and loans from Chester Dale—were among the more than 600 works of European and American art on view throughout the elegant spaces designed by renowned architect John Russell Pope. The majestic building on the National Mall, built of Tennessee marble with Indiana and Alabama limestone, Vermont marble, and American oak used in interiors, also proclaimed a place for America in the history of western culture.

A number of the works that the Gallery acquired in the 1940s still anchor the American galleries today, including masterpieces such as William Merritt Chase's *A Friendly Call* (1895), James McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1862), Childe Hassam's *Allies Day, May 1917* (1917), Winslow Homer's *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)* (1873–1876), George Bellows' *Both Members of This Club* (1909), and George Inness' *The Lackawanna Valley* (c. 1856).

Unlike the Gallery's French and Italian collections, whose character was determined by the gifts of Chester Dale and Samuel Kress, the American collection—even taking into account the generosity of Andrew Mellon and Paul Mellon—is not defined by the gifts of any one person, but by many donors and foundations across the country who generously have added to the collections. Directors David Finley, John Walker, J.

Carter Brown, and Earl A. Powell III, and curators William P. Campbell, John Wilmerding, Nicolai Cikovsky, and Franklin Kelly have contributed their vision and leadership in developing the Gallery's superb holdings of American art.

Thomas Cole's four-part allegory, *The Voyage of Life* (1842), which hangs in an octagonal room, serves as a gateway to the American galleries and collection. Following this is a gallery devoted to the works of Gilbert Stuart, the most accomplished American portraitist of Federal America. The works include the only surviving and intact set of portraits of the first five presidents of the United States, known as the Gibbs-Coolidge set.

The renowned artists of the Peale family are represented by one of the finest American portraits, Rembrandt Peales' *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* (1801) (not currently on view), as well as Charles Willson Peale's *John Beale Bordley*, Raphaelle Peale's *A Dessert* (1814), and James Peale's *Fruit Still Life with Chinese Export Basket* (1824).

As visitors proceed through the grand spaces they will encounter highlights of George Catlin's Indian paintings, donated by Paul Mellon, and American folk art from the collection of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. Both sets of gifts total more than 600 paintings, representing more than a third of all the works in the American paintings collection.

Among other American masterpieces on view are John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778) and a number of important landscape and marine paintings, such as Jasper Francis Cropsey's *Autumn—On the Hudson River* (1860) and *The Spirit of War* (1851), Frederic Edwin Church's *El Rio de Luz (The River of Light)* (1877), Cole's *A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)* (1839), and John Frederick Kensett's *Beach at Beverly* (c. 1869/1872), as well as two works once thought to be lost: Albert Bierstadt's *Lake Lucerne* (1858) and Asher B. Durand's *The Stranded Ship* (1844).

One of America's most accomplished and beloved artists, Winslow Homer, is well-represented by works including *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)* (1873–1876), *Home, Sweet Home* (c. 1873), and *Right and Left* (1909). Along with the works by Homer are

distinguished genre paintings such as George Caleb Bingham's *Mississippi Boatman* (1850) and Eastman Johnson's *Gathering Lilies* (1865). Among works by Thomas Eakins, one of the most accomplished portraitists of the 19th and early 20th centuries, are *The Biglin Brothers Racing* (1872) and *Baby at Play* (1876). A small cabinet gallery presents still lifes, including William Michael Harnett's *The Old Violin* (1886), Joseph Decker's *Ripening Pears* (c. 1884/1885), and Samuel Lewis' *A Deception* (c. 1780).

The final American galleries include fine examples of American impressionism, such as John Henry Twachtman's *Winter Harmony* (c. 1890/1900) and Hassam's *Poppies, Isles of Shoals* (1891) as well as four great masterpieces by the most accomplished of the Ashcan school artists, George Bellows, the previously mentioned *Both Members of This Club* (1909), *Blue Morning* (1909), and *The Lone Tenement* (1909), as well as the recently cleaned *New York* (1911).

Gallery 66 features one of the greatest works of 19th-century American sculpture. The *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment* is on a long-term renewable loan to the Gallery from the National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, NH. Created by the preeminent sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), the relief masterfully depicts Colonel Shaw and the first African American infantry unit from the North to fight for the Union during the Civil War.

The American galleries have become a place where scholars and visitors alike can contemplate America's collective cultural memory in profound ways. Even as great American paintings from the 19th century become more difficult to acquire, the Gallery remains committed to enhancing the collection to secure its greatness for future generations.

For more information about the Gallery's American collection, click on:

<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/amer.shtm>

(<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/amer.shtm>) .

American Collection: Related Programs and Tours

Film Documentary:

Augustus Saint-Gaudens: Master of American Sculpture

Thursday, February 12, 12:30 p.m.

Sunday, February 15, 12:00 noon

East Building Auditorium

First come, first seated

A new feature documentary film on the great American sculptor whose major works include the Standing Lincoln in Chicago and the Shaw Memorial in Boston will be shown. Paul Sanderson, the film's producer, director, and writer, will present introductory remarks on *Augustus Saint-Gaudens: Master of American Sculpture*, on Sunday, February 15, 12:00 noon (length: 74 minutes).

Choral Festival of Early American Song

East or West Garden Courts, West Building

Regional groups perform songs written in America prior to 1900 or later arrangements of tunes popular up to 1900:

April 17, 1:30 p.m.

National Men's Chorus, Washington, DC

April 17, 3:30 p.m.

Columbia Union Choir, Takoma Park, MD

April 18, 1:30 p.m.

Master Singers of Virginia, Fairfax, VA

April 18, 3:30 p.m.

Greater South Jersey Chorus, NJ

April 19, 1:30 p.m.

Central Bucks High School West Choir, Lewistown, PA

April 19, 3:30 p.m.

Eighteenth Street Singers, Washington, DC

Gallery Talk:

Augustus Saint-Gaudens' *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment*

February 9–22, 12:00 noon, daily

Meet in Rotunda, Ground Floor, West Building

This talk offers an in-depth discussion of the accomplishments of one of the first regiments of African American men to fight in the cause of freedom and the preservation of the Union under President Lincoln, as depicted by Saint-Gaudens, America's renowned sculptor of the 19th century.

Guided Tours

American Collection

Meet at West Building Rotunda

In English:

Monday, Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday at 2:30 p.m.

For tours in French and Spanish, consult the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>) or inquire at the Information Desks. One-hour tours for groups of 20 or more adults in English or in some foreign languages may be booked three weeks to four months in advance by calling (202) 842-6247.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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